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ART. I. — THE MODERN TYPE OF OPPRESSION.

THERE are two kinds of liberty, unlike in character and often opposite in effect. The one consists in the mere absence of restraint ; the other, in such an order and discipline as shall make the relations of men wings rather than fetters, salutary, serviceable, productive, rather than a means to demoralization and degeneracy. Now, it is apparent that the attention of the modern world has for some time been devoted chiefly to the first named, that is, to the liberty which consists in being left to follow one's personal inclination. The stress of effort for a century has gone to the removal of social restraints, as, for example, in that setting aside of restrictions upon the liberty of assemblage, of speech, and of publication, which, if complete only in England and America, has more or less taken place in all civilized lands. These changes constitute an important amelioration, and it is by no means with a design to disparage them that we remark upon the peculiar and somewhat exclusive character of modern reform. The century has done well to deliver itself from many restraints, which, however appropriate to the moral conditions of an earlier age, were only hindrances or impertinences in ours. Liberty in the customary sense, that is, the free initiative of the individual, contributes greatly to impulse, energy, enterprise, zest, and thus is the proper correlative of a capable social discipline : combine

the two, each at its best, and the highest productivity of civilization is provided for. Our time, however, has set its heart upon one of the two, to the temporary neglect of the other. We disestablish, displace, abolish, make room for "the voluntary principle," and meantime hold it for the highest merit of government; not that it should be wise, capable, steadfast, able to secure for the nation the liberation of social health, but that it should be in the nature of a weather-vane, well poised and oiled, to turn with every wind.

As there are two kinds of liberty, so also there are two distinct types of oppression, the one proceeding directly from government, the other from the want of it, or want of knowledge, understanding, consistency, sequence, in its conduct. The former exists where the just, wholesome freedom of personal choice and action is of purpose invaded, restricted, taken away by a public authority, which, set over against the nation as an opposite interest, is strong and selfish enough to indulge itself at the nation's expense; and there are many who will regard no other as possible. The latter, which, nevertheless, is but too possible, exists where, in the absence of a sovereign, sanitary control, liberty becomes lawless and a canker; where egotism, unrestrained, runs riot; where private interest, abandoned to its own conduct, becomes predatory; and where, to crown all, government itself, amid the great factions of private force, resembles a weak nation between powerful and contending neighbors, forced into an alliance now with this, now with that, and strong enough to afford either a decisive reinforcement, but never strong enough to maintain its independence, still less to impose peace. One oppression, which government may of purpose and upon system inflict; another, which it alone can prevent, and which, in a complex, powerfully motivated civilization, it will be able to prevent only by having a masterly head and skilled hand. Is the latter the less frequent or less fatal of the two? He that reads history as it is, instead of reading his own bias into it, will scarcely say so. Despotism is undesirable, but candor must confess that under a despotism civilization has been seen to prosper and arrive at better things; in a condition of anarchy, with that multifarious self-oppression of a people which comes of it, civilizations have many times been seen to perish, never

once to grow. Mexico, during its subjection to a form of delegate-despotism, which is a bad kind, grew in numbers, in wealth, in education and arts. Careful computations made by Alexander von Humboldt show that the ratio of births to deaths was 175 to 100. During forty years of no-government, misnamed "republic," not only was there a miserable lapse into poverty and ignorance, but the population remained stationary, its entire natural increase consumed. If it is bad to be beaten or bound, it is not felicity to commit suicide. From a strong and selfish government large classes may suffer the one; without able government, society is always on the way to the other, perhaps dealing itself great strokes of revolution, perhaps slowly pricking itself to death with pins. As the individual body incessantly generates poisons of which it would perish, were not their elimination also systematic and unceasing, so it is with society; private interest, if not kept momentarily under correction by an honorable and aerating public system, breeds plagues, which, having destroyed whatever is nobler, are fatal at last to their original.

In making this sort of oppression an object of attention and reflection, the American citizen simply resumes that point of view from which the political history of his nation goes out. The Federal Constitution owed its formation to a painful sense of just this. Liberty, the liberty of unrestraint, was the felicity of 1783; a means to put it under official control, to make Obligation its master, and to force upon it the regimen of health, was that of 1789. When the War of Independence closed, the people, with some exceptions, stood in a negative attitude toward government in general; they thought, with Jefferson, that "energetic government," under the republican form as under another, "is always oppressive"; and they rejoiced with him that in their happy land "the necessary evil" was reduced to a minimum. Stern fact soon made havoc with their complacency. What arrived was anything but the golden age expected. It was inexplicable; there was no government that *could* oppress, all public burdens were thrown off, the pursuit of happiness left open as never before; within was the achieving genius of the Anglo-Saxon; without, prodigal wealth of natural estate: yet instead of elasticity, languor; instead of

bounding motion, debility dragging its feet ; instead of happiness, a pursuit of it to catch the contrary. Everywhere was that "rage of private interest" which Marshall signalizes as characteristic of the time, and yet no prosperity. Here was a people that would not honestly try to pay its debts, but that spared payment only to sink in poverty. Commerce was seen with empty holds and rotting ships ; capital with closed coffers, fearing to venture ; labor with idle hands ; meantime, over large sections of the country, expenditure grew lavish as means diminished. Egotism, envy, distrust, corrupted social relations, and, as usual, conscience and understanding were corrupted with them ; wild revolutionary fanaticisms — customary product of such conditions — arose and burst into war. Such was the actual present, into which that painted future had emerged. "We have thought too well of human nature," wrote Washington, sadly. Better, and truer to his real thought, had he said, "We have thought too ill of the conditions under which human nature can do itself justice." Society, as a mere inorganic aggregate of individuals, is natural to wolves, and unnatural to the civilizing genius of man ; and if human nature in an unnatural situation fails to bring forth its best, what wonder ? Morals were as little designed to have their sufficient effect without institutions as hands without tools. A systematized public virtue, sovereign in power and instant in effect, makes, one might say, the climate in which alone private virtue can generally thrive, and without which only here and there an impregnable constitution will keep its health. Or, more specifically, such a system is necessary in four ways : first, as a fixed moral capital or estate, laid up in customs and laws for the behoof of all, so that conscience need not perpetually go forth barehanded to struggle with the rudeness of primitive conditions ; secondly, as a bridle to private interest ; thirdly, as a protection against violence and fraud ; lastly, as a means to that union which alone furnishes the hand with either defensive strength or productive power. The Federalists got an eye upon such truths, and began clearly to discover why their paradisiacal expectations had been so disappointed. They saw that oppressions spring spontaneously, like malaria from undrained lands, in

defect of a right public system ; and they perceived, too, that, as the stoutest walker walks with no success when up to the hips in a bog, so conscience flounders and becomes unclean without a firm public ground.

This perception, made keen by a grinding experience, determined the character of their politics. In framing the Federal system at Philadelphia, and afterwards in putting it into effect, their thought was : the people, that is, the mass of private interests and inclinations, must be *governed*, governed by choice abilities and efficient means, or, as the alternative, it will breed for itself oppressions to swarm like locusts, swarm and devour. They believed that, with assiduous cultivation of a right spirit, it could be thus governed with its own consent and co-operation. By no means, however, did they prefer the republican system as being less a government than any other, and the nearest approach to none at all. Quite the contrary ; they saw in this system the likeliest means to put choice abilities in power, to secure them confidence when in power, to relieve them of hampering jealousies, and thus to make a government distinctly more effective than any other, — that is, should the people show a spirit equal to the *rôle* attempted. That was “the experiment of free government,” as Washington understood it, — an experiment, not at making a government which should rule only as the weathercock rules the wind, but rather to see whether the people would faithfully choose men fit to govern, and then let them do it.

There was another party, that wished only weathercock-rule. To these men the Federal system was an offence. Jefferson uttered their feeling when, at sight of the new Constitution, he wrote to Colonel Smith, “You have been setting up a kite to keep the hen-yard in order.” Having mentioned Jefferson, we may as well take him for a type of that political direction, which in his time he led, and as whose risen Elijah he is remembered. Abroad during the miserable, demoralized years of the Confederacy, he had but distantly heard of the prevailing shames. For a while, he would believe no word of the reports that reached him, denouncing them as “British lies.” When at length his self-pleasing incredulity was forced to give way, when it became plain that the American States,

bankrupt in pocket and on the way to be so in morals, were making their liberty a byword and a hissing to the world, then he chose to see in the unwelcome fact, not the effect of a situation made by a false direction in politics, but rather a native trait of American character. "Among many good qualities, which my countrymen possess," tranquilly wrote he to a foreign observer, "some of a different character, unhappily, mix themselves. The most remarkable are indolence, extravagance, and infidelity to their engagements." The last named, however, was an accident, not a vice. His countrymen were not rogues; they merely liked spending, hated work, and chose rather to promise and not pay than either to labor or spare! The remedy was to let them run in debt until no sane mortal would trust them more. They would work when they must do so or starve; they would be frugal when want of credit and indisposition to labor should render them so; and they would break no engagements when unable to make any, — when, their word everywhere known for counterfeit coin, all the world should cast it contemptuously back. In all this, meanwhile, he was playing the optimist, and looking on "the bright side." A people has indeed sunk low when its sanguine friends are driven to *hoping* for it in this style. Washington's mourning over the evil days seems rapture beside this smiling prognostic.

There was, however, an alternative in the case; the evils of the time must be attributed to defect of character or defect of government, one of the two. Now, to the latter Jefferson would on no condition impute them. That oppression could spring from liberty, that is, from private interest and the individual pursuit of happiness, when not made amenable to the laws of social welfare, was to him a proposition not only preposterous, but flagitious; action proceeding from that point of view was, as honest action, unintelligible; corruption or treason *must* be at the bottom of it. His prepossession had been strengthened by observation. In France he had seen what partly was, and partly but appeared to be, the selfish rule of a class whom long isolation in hereditary privilege, divorced from all serious duty, had debauched in morals, while estranging them in sentiment and interest from the nation at

large ; and in their hands government had been made a gold spoon for the idle hundreds, and an iron yoke for the toiling millions. All the virtue there was in the man rose up against that injustice ; and his passionate aversion to it was, perhaps, his most honorable trait. In this, again, he saw the type of all oppression, real or possible. To guard, therefore, against this seemed to him the sum of all wisdom and all rectitude in politics. Hence his political direction. According to him, the dominant design of all republican politics is to find and put in action a means, not of wisely, ably, justly governing the nation, but of governing the government ; not of making a public system superior to the mass of private interests and inclinations, but rather of securing to the latter an instant and unqualified supremacy. Any government whatsoever, as distinct from the people in person, he regarded as an adulteration of republicanism, and as sure to destroy it altogether, if not endowed with an excellent incapability to do anything but wait upon what might appear at the moment to be the popular will. In constituting its *personnel*, one should, therefore, seek a fitness, not to govern, but to be governed ; not to counsel and devise, but to receive orders and comply ; not, in short, to find out *for* the people, but only to find out *from* them, what measures should be taken. The Constitution provided for a responsibility of the government to the people, to be effectuated by periodical election ; Jefferson insisted upon more, he must have a “ *direct* and constant control ” of it by the people, as he could not often enough say. This object implies, first, a principle of selection at the polls ; secondly, a principle of conduct at the capital. At the polls one will inquire for quick ears rather than capable judgments, for a pliability to what may be thought the people’s will rather than an intelligent devotion to its weal, and, having to choose between the two, will always prefer the supple readiness of a ’prentice hand to the devising head of an independent master. At the capital the persons chosen are not to find out by a broad study of facts what were really best for the nation ; *they* have no liberty to judge what were best ; they are there to study only wishes, and to exercise themselves in pick-thank legislation ; they *may* put forth “ motions ” as feelers and ascertain what will “ take ” ; they

must hearken outside, conjecture as they can from the greater noise where is the greater number of voices, and act accordingly, complying promptly with the prevailing wish, if they can find one, industriously doing nothing, if, among the many noises, no one seems clearly preponderant. We are to have a legislature of forty millions acting by a proxy of two or three hundred,—a proxy not generally commissioned, but to be under “direct and constant control”; we are to have an executive of forty millions publishing its will through a Presidential town-crier. That is to be the ideal of representative republicanism.

It is known which of the two tendencies prevailed. Jefferson, in the first year of our century, his elevation to the Presidency secure, and his soul elate with victory, spurned the republicanism of Washington and Adams as no republicanism, but “only its travesty”; twelve years later boasted that “the revolution of 1800,” signified by his own election, “was as real a revolution in the principles of our government as that of 1776 was in its form.” The boast was not idle; there had indeed been a revolution of principles without change of form; and what was the nature of it has been indicated.

Between those opposite ideals we do not here judge. But Jefferson judged his own so far as this: he thought it suited only to a simple, moral society, and despaired of it, as of government and society in general, from the moment when it should have to cope with the conditions of a many-cities civilization, like that of the Old World. “Our reliance,” he said, “cannot deceive us so long as we remain virtuous; and I think we shall be so as long as agriculture is our principal object. . . . When we get piled upon one another in great cities as in Europe, we shall become corrupt as in Europe, and go to eating one another, as they do there.” The founders of the Republic had seen the eating one another already in process on their own side the sea, and wished for an able government, that could provide effectually against it; they were stigmatized as corruptionists, monocrats, monarchists, for their pains. Jefferson would not see that it had come, but saw it coming, and wished or hoped only to put off the evil day. “As long as the people can find employment in cultivating the land,” he had written, “I would not convert them into mari-

ners, artisans, or anything else." Manufactures, however, were his chief aversion, since, he said, "I regard the class of artificers as the panders of vice, and the instruments by which the liberties of a people are generally overturned." He wished it were possible to exclude both manufactures and commerce forever, and to make the American people tillers of the soil exclusively, raising only "raw products," to be exchanged, he said, for foreign fabrics, imported in foreign bottoms. The happy situation might be a little prolonged, but could not be perpetuated; and with its passing away, he looked only to see America become what Europe was at the close of the eighteenth century, when politics and morals alike were at the lowest ebb. Meantime, his political principles were designed for a social condition recognized by himself as temporary, though this did not lessen his bitterness against those who, fostering the growth of that civilization which he feared, excited his fears yet more by seeking to provide for an able sanitary control of the interests that should arise.

The situation was to pass sooner than he dreamed. Not only was America to grow with unexampled rapidity in population, in wealth, in the magnitude and complexity of private interests; not only was it thus to fly Mr. Jefferson's ideal of a moral and pastoral life, requiring little government, and to acquire with astonishing quickness the needs of populous lands and old civilizations; but, moreover, at the opening of the century, just when his political direction became dominant, the whole civilized world was entering upon a series of economical changes, whose effect would be to empower private interest as never before, to mass interests against each other, to break up conserving customs with the conditions to which they had belonged, to mobilize civilization in an unheard-of degree, and thus to enhance immensely the need of a systematic sanitary control. Since the beginning of this century an entire set of new forces have been brought into play, all to be regarded as acquisitions, but all needing to be governed, and all, if ungoverned, dangerous. In presence of these, political duty is to be studied anew; and in view of them, the radical traditionalist, spinning out his little store of maxims borrowed from the century past, and esteeming himself the

most progressive of mortals when, with eyes shut to the living, pregnant reality, he opens an "advanced" school in the tomb of Rousseau or Condorcet, seems the saddest anachronism the time has to show. We propose a glance at some of these new developments, which enrich and endanger the civilization of our epoch.

1. The new means of transportation, travel, and communication have effected a social transformation of vast importance. From them has come an enormous growth of cities, a sudden extension of their influence, and a spreading abroad of the spirit of commerce, until it touches every workshop and farmhouse in the land. Our former rural civilization, with its simple manners, moderate desires, and autonomous life, has as good as disappeared; the country is now but the suburb of the city. We remember when in a coast township two hundred miles from Boston the wages of labor and the prices of most commodities had a strictly local adjustment. Butter from the farm was sold at an invariable rate year after year. Wages were a dollar a day in haying time, two thirds as much at other seasons, and twelve or twelve and a half dollars a month for the year round. Cloth was made in the house with some assistance from a mill near by, which received a portion of the fabric in payment. Money transactions were extremely limited; money-making, as now understood, unknown. Fortunes, or what were esteemed such,—for he was rich who was taxed for ten thousand,—grew by the half-dollar, and with liberal use of the maxim that "a penny saved is as good as a penny earned." The ups and downs of the metropolis, the mutations, the chances, the shifts of commerce, still more of speculation, were matters of far-off rumor; the panic of 1836–37 went over like a wind in an elevated stratum of the atmosphere; one saw the clouds fly, and that was all. A third of a century passes; the township has gained little in population, less in wealth, not at all in the average of comfort; but the local adjustment and comparative fixity of prices, the easy calculation of income and expense, the independence of city manners and mutations, the homely, equable life, all have disappeared with the open wood-fire and the sanded floor. The change is typical of one that has taken place throughout the country.

Meantime, while the spirit of commerce has displaced so much, and made itself dominant, there has been an equal movement toward commercial centralization. Fifty years ago, Newburyport was an independent trading centre, more independent of Boston than Boston or Cincinnati or Chicago now is of New York. We know an aged gentleman, who formerly, as a wholesale druggist and importer in the little town first named, had extensive country connections in the northeast of Massachusetts and adjacent parts of New Hampshire; he lived to see the railroad steal them all away, and transfer them to Boston, while the latter city, in its turn, has been becoming dependent to a degree unknown and undreamed of at an earlier date. A banker, responding to some remark upon the wide effect of financial irregularities in New York, said, "Yes, disease of the heart is dangerous." The bold figure of speech was not too bold. Commercial centralization has already reached a stage where it may justly be compared to physiological unity.

Moreover, the connection, while acquiring this breadth and concentration, has become in the same degree quick, instant in effect. The means of communication act as a nerve-system, to propagate influence, and make it instantaneous. Financial combinations covering half a continent are effected, as it were, in a day. The palpitations of the stock exchange are felt like an electric throb from the Atlantic to the Pacific shore. To-day's doings or misdoings in the metropolis reach Bangor and St. Louis to-morrow. A grocer in Vermont or Minnesota, over his morning's coffee, inquires in New York, through the newspaper, at what price he shall sell a pound of coffee after breakfast.

To all this, regarding its effect on one side only, a cordial welcome may be given, for it implies a social vitalization more extensive, more unitive, and more active. To name the great cities of the world is to name its systems of civilization; the words we have daily in use, and *civilization* among them, testify to the closeness of the connection. But in the republics of antiquity a peculiar fact may be observed: they are bisected; a gap wide and deep lies between the city and the country; the whole life consists of municipal civilization on

the one hand, and rural barbarism, or what closely approaches it, on the other. It was the feudal system which took the first great step toward a genuine rural civilization, graced with manners and arts ; over its grave, where it lies little honored nowadays, one may thank it for this vast piece of service. The new means of communication, however, are resuming its work on a larger scale, and making such a future as had no antitype in the past. A century since, Paris was a nation of half a million, with twenty-four millions of dependants ; but not long ago M. Thiers, with his peasant army, was thundering through the throats of cannon at her gates the news that France had become the nation, and Paris but a city. He announced the fact ; the railway had made it. The old duality disappears, the old deadness of the extremes along with it ; and if disturbed conditions, spasms of pain, flushes of fever, and a new sense of defect in the social morale keep it company, none should be surprised and none discouraged.

Obviously, however, this condition requires for its health a finer public regimen, a more effective public discipline. The larger the spread of sail a ship carries in a wind, the more skilled and able should be the hand at the helm. So the higher the vitalization of society, as of any organism whatever, the more effect of *system* there should be, and the greater promptitude, precision, delicacy, sequence, in its effect. If the social *morale*, as maintained through the medium of institutions, does not become more capable and commanding as social activity increases, oppression arrives, the worst oppression, that of demoralization and disease. Here it is that modern civilization labors. It has proceeded from one degree to another of commercial mobility ; centralization is every day more complete, connection every day more close and quick ; the railways and telegraphic wires are multiplied nerves, the cities nervous centres and batteries to propagate influence, the nation all one complexity of sensitive life ; and meantime the head, the controlling power, that should propagate yet more quickly, yet more vigorously and surely, the effect of a wise, healthy, sovereign system, — what of that ? That is to be whatever the varying combinations and push of private interests may for the moment make it. It is an ideal that one can scarcely

regard as well suited to the reality and its demands. In the midst of our swift-rushing civilization, the public system, even when carefully made capable rather than incapable, too often resembles one who should attempt to steer a ship of a thousand tons with the tiller of a cockboat, or to balance the action of a cathedral clock with the pendulum of a parlor timepiece.

2. The modern system of credit, with the banking system that has arisen to be its agent and exponent, is not strictly a creation of the present century, but has obtained in it so sudden and vast a development that it might be considered as such. Debt and credit there have been in all ages ; but the time is not far behind when there were no national debts, no bank-notes, no commercial paper in customary circulation, no debts but such as were contracted between two individuals standing face to face ; now debt and credit are the element in which the world's economy lives, moves, and has its being. The spirit of commerce, we have said, has become ubiquitous. With commerce goes credit as its inseparable accompaniment, working to like effect, and making still more of that mobility which is the peculiar modern condition.

In some sense, credit is the flower of civilization, that is, of the human virtue which makes and sustains civilization. What is it at bottom but a trust of man in man so stable, so guaranteed, that it passes in the market, counted as gold ? Between man and man, however, in mere individual relation, no such trust ever did or can arise on a scale to become a great social agent. Only a virtue which has the breadth and coherence of a state, and the effect of law, begets it ; only a system of social order so continued and assured that its effect is taken for granted, renders possible this raising of trust to the degree of a stated economical power. It is a late effect of that liberation which civil institutions, and the victorious unity of civil virtue in them, secure,—a liberation by no means to be found in Rousseau's "natural liberty." That it demands more of what made it,—that when inventive skill has created the locomotive engine, another skill must manage and make it safe,—that without this rising to an equality with our own work, we shall be mastered and mangled by it,—is understood. But the fact remains ; credit is a product of

social virtue, as the engine of invention and mechanic skill, and it exists as the diploma of civilization, attesting that it has graduated with that degree.

The medal has its obverse. The bright side has been suggested: there is a shadowed side also; and it is the sanguine coward, courageous while and because he believes there is no danger, who will look on the bright side alone. No need now to say that riches may take wings to themselves; they are only on the wing, ever in flight, whether or not to fly away. All pecuniary interests, with which all moral interests have a connection so close, are grown precarious. If, now, we suppose, what, unhappily, may be more than supposed, a large proportion, not easily distinguished, of delusive credit, reposing on no proper basis of either capital or character, and in the nature of a forgery upon the community at large; if we add extensive combinations and powerful appliances, designed to act upon credit otherwise sound, like those who set fires that they may pillage while others are fighting the flames; if, accordingly, it becomes a stated necessity in the conduct of business to trust practically what the mind can but half trust at best; if, by consequence, legitimate trade and honest investment, reduced to conjectural ground, are reduced also to venture like the gambler, turning the dice-box to take their chance;—if this be, not wholly indeed, but always in considerable part the situation, what ensues? The financial condition resembles that of lands extremely subject to earthquakes, where the ground is always shaking, and may at any moment open under the feet. Is it not approximately the modern situation? “Panics,” that are to finance what earthquakes are to the globe, have already acquired an irregular periodicity; while if these do not arrive, to shake our Lisbons down, it is commonly because the same thing is distributed, manifesting itself as chronic rather than acute. The moral force of civilization has produced an agent which its immoral forces seize upon and use against itself; it has become a business to catch credit with lying shows, to blow bubbles with only foul air inside and pass them off for sterling substance, or to “corner” honest credit and extort toll; what the virtue of civilization has brought forth, its vice captures and turns against it.

The situation tells upon morals, upon intellect, upon physical health, upon sanity. Buckle, in his chapters upon Spain, remarked upon the moral effect of a constant liability to earthquakes, asserting that a shaking ground unsettles civilization; unsettles, as it were, the human soul itself. His observations might have taken a wider extent; all instability, social as physical, above all, instability of a nature to fire the hopes and spur the fears of egotism, works to the like effect. Niebuhr, again, was persuaded that more than once the morals of a civilization, and therewith the civilization itself, have succumbed to a great pestilence, first with that egotism of terror, then that contempt of precaution, since no precaution seems to avail, which are induced by it. A commercial panic is a pestilence in its way, and in the realm of morals is always more or less destructive, often severely so, while that inflation of spurious prosperity, which alternates with collapse, corrupts yet more. Finally, a constant condition of financial insecurity not only seduces conscience and extinguishes honor, but induces a peculiar *low* concentration of mind, which, become habitual, incapacitates it for the genial expansion of good sense. A Blondin, balancing himself upon his rope, must have his soul in the feet, — a focusing of the mind not likely to give it either elevation or breadth. Modern trade, insomuch as it has an ever-fluctuating credit for a foothold, is placed somewhat in the same position. The rope, too, has rotten strands; one ventures upon it, hoping that it will hold this time!

It is certain, then, that the system of credit, as now developed, is an immense acquisition, and certain, too, that, as now conditioned, it is subject to abuses egregious, outrageous, perilous, not always to be endured. How, now, to correct these abuses? It is one of several hard problems, which our own and the ensuing age will have to solve. Certain, meanwhile, that they will never be corrected by private action alone: government must help, and be capable, as well as beyond suspicion sound, that it may help.

3. Another modern phenomenon is the private corporation. Here, too, it is a vast productive force which one has in view. That massing of capital, effected by means of this modern institution, and seen to be proceeding daily through leagues and

coalescences to aggregations more and more enormous, has given to enterprise another right hand, the hand, too, of a Titan. When the modern individualist spirit, become fully established, had given to all activity a corresponding form, it might have seemed that works to rival those of antiquity, as of Egypt, India, Assyria, — works accomplished by the massing of men in subjection, — had ceased to be possible. In Burke's great speech upon "The Nabob of Arcot's Debts," he observed that in the Carnatic alone were to be found above eleven hundred public reservoirs for irrigation, from the extent of some acres to more than five miles in circumference, "built," he said, "with admirable skill and labor, and maintained at a mighty charge." The British government, strong only in the strength, and weak with the infirmity, of our individualizing times, could not even keep in repair those noble resources, which the "insatiable benevolence," as the great rhetorician called it, of ancient rule had provided; and the famine, that strewed the Carnatic with unburied dead, came in consequence. To the ancient massing of men succeeds, however, the modern massing of capital, and powers that seemed lost forever are restored to civilization.

Of this much has already come, while its effects, so far from being exhausted, or even approaching their predestined term, are, we believe, scarcely as yet in full prospect. Who knows what reclamation of wastes, what restoration of denuded lands, what systems of drainage and irrigation wellnigh continental, what corrections of climate even, may one day issue from it? Imagine this force brought to bear in its grandest proportions upon the valley of the Amazon, upon the wilds of Africa, upon deserts that are such from mere luxuriance, regions starved by abundance, barren from over-fecundity, and closed to civilization by their very ability to feed it. What other power has the world now in hand, that were able to tame the tropics? The railway, according to Mr. Ruskin, makes the globe in effect smaller, by reducing distance; but the power which is behind the railway can, on the contrary, render it, as a household for man, incomparably more spacious.

By nothing, meanwhile, is civilization more gravely menaced than by this very ally. Once again, through its access, civiliza-

tion is in one of those immature, expectant stages, which announce an abler epoch, but which, in doing so, announce added obligations, new tasks, a fresh travail of intelligence and pain, it may be beyond that of death, as the price of a richer life. Ever the appearance of unprecedented powers is a sight to elate the thoughtless, and to sober yet more deeply the minds that were sober before; for they come to serve only if duly commanded, and otherwise to destroy. In the present case, our Titan has already sufficiently shown, but is daily showing afresh, its extreme need of a master. Unregulated, it has organized exaction, pampered fraud, systematized pillage, given castles to corruption, made dukes and archdukes of plundering speculators, and afforded but too good excuse to the craze that shrieks against capital itself.

Neither the morals nor the industrial interests of civilization can endure always to be preyed upon in this way. Massed capital is a good thing, but massed extortion and massed fraud are not good; a means must be found, a sure means, to prevent the good thing from becoming the bad one. This new agent simply *must* be put under control. In our country there is a disposition to attempt the work, or one section of it, but in what seems to us an unhealthy and unpromising way. In the "granger" movement, one aggregation of private interest is pitted against another, resolved to capture it, if possible. Whether the capture will be effected seems doubtful, supposing it desirable. Little good will come of it, we apprehend; and if not good, then evil. Social dissension, disruption, one more fissure of that social unity which is the safeguard of national unison, have already come of it, and are too likely to continue doing so. Now, social contention, without a clear, commanding, wholesome decision as its result, makes political indigestion, and by continuance renders it chronic. The agitator, administering his dose from the platform, will have a wholesome effect, provided he is not a quack, who relies upon the fact that there is disease to prove his nostrum the proper curative, and provided also there is a public system, which can respond by throwing the medicine off, and the affliction along with it. But when conspirations of private interest, on this side and that, marshal their forces and wage their war, while

the public system is upon principle made such that it *can* but trim and try to please, agitation even against indubitable mischiefs is likely itself to be but another mischief added to them.

4. The free commerce and free competition, which in recent times have succeeded to a system of multiplied restrictions, have brought obvious and important aids. Free commerce makes the whole world every man's market, in which to buy and sell. It enables those who have special advantages, natural or acquired, to obtain the fullest use of them, and at the same time to impart their benefit to the largest number. Meantime, it obliterates provincialism, liberalizes men by a large acquaintance, promotes a good understanding between nations by customs of peaceful, profitable intercourse, and is probably doing more than any other one influence to soften and civilize the international code. In respect indeed to the comity of nations, it has succeeded to the *rôle* assumed in the Middle Ages by the Catholic polity; and if there be in the modern equivalent for ecclesiastical administration less of heaven, there is in it less of hell also. Free competition, again, which belongs to the same system, has aspects exceedingly favorable, though, to be sure, it has been prejudiced by a celebration too profuse and too little discriminating. It is valuable, in the first place, as a principle of unconscious regulation; regulation accomplished, not by any express mechanism, liable always to get out of order, and costly even when perfectly in gear, but by the ordinary effect of human motives. Free competition, again, develops by demanding individual resource; it puts every man upon his mettle, tempts enterprise, and makes each the nursling of that necessity which is the mother of invention. The free initiative of the individual does so much to evoke activity and give zest, that there cannot be too much of it, provided only it is so kept under correction as not to imperil social stability, coherence, and health. Once more, free competition is praised, and with reason, as a principle of "natural selection"; it sifts out incompetence, we are told, gives the tools to him that can handle them, and, pushing every man toward the place where his abilities will serve him best, secures also to the community its benefit of their most effective use. In some such strain are its eulogists accustomed to speak of it,

and there is sense in what they say. We have reason, therefore, to reckon this system among the signal acquisitions of the modern era.

It is good, however, with one indispensable condition, one, if no more. Let probity compete with probity, faithful skill with the like skill, let there be a fair rivalry, and the prize go to the best man; then morals are conserved, while industrial pressure is always toward more and more of what is good. But if probity must compete with permitted fraud, genuine with deceptive production, then the pressure is in the opposite direction, and a principle of *unnatural* selection put in force. Now, that a large and severely oppressive proportion of this has got into the modern system of competition, is a fact that no assiduity of winking can wink out of sight. Law, disconcerted, in despair, looks on and lets the thing go. Government does indeed try its hand here and there in a small way, as in forbidding milk to be watered, or the flesh of animals which have died of disease to be sold as food; but in general we have given up, and know of nothing better than that every man be put upon his wits, and make his own suspicious eyes his guardian as best he can.

It is indeed certain that government cannot undertake with success to be wit for all the simple, and knowledge for all the ignorant, but it is also certain that the business of leaving every man to fight it out with all others, may be overdone. If, meantime, this setting of every man to buy with the eyes of a detective be relied upon as a sufficient means to keep up the standard of production, and to assure its morals, the reliance is obviously ill placed. Within the present century there has been throughout the world a marked deterioration in the quality of ordinary plain work. Not to speak of the extent to which the adulteration of foods and fabrics goes on, one must recognize a tendency toward slight and flimsy fabrication, toward paint and gloss as the cover for what is intrinsically of little worth: in this respect, it is certain that the world has gone backward. Something of insubstantial and fictitious in the product of labor has become a trait of the present age; there is an expenditure of industry to make things look better than they really are, and sell for more than they are really worth, of which it is mere

self-deception to say that the like and to the like extent has been seen in all ages.

Carlyle took a young friend to see two houses in his neighborhood, the one two hundred, the other ten years old. The bricks at the corners of the former were still sharp as when they left the mould, and the mortar was hard and smooth, like polished rock ; the new house scarcely had corners, the brick was so worn away, while the mortar was crumbling, and could be picked out with the finger. There are in London square miles of new-built houses that are but gilded traps to catch tenants in. The English law seems expressly designed to favor the process. It requires the tenant to leave the house in as good repair as he found it, — which commonly means, such being the quality of the work, rebuilding it in part, and may mean rebuilding entire. Of the latter an example : A London carpenter hired a house of a bishop, and one day it literally tumbled down over his head. Luckily escaping alive, he wrote to the bishop, and acquainted him with the event, supposing that the latter would, of course, hasten to build the house anew. No answer was returned, and he wrote again, saying : “ I am paying house-rent with no house ; will your lordship please attend to the matter at once.” The bishop now replied, and the response was, “ If the house has fallen down, *you* are to rebuild it, not I. Please do so promptly, and see that the work is properly done.” The astonished carpenter took legal advice, found that the law indeed required this of him, and had to expend the earnings of his life to the last penny in complying with its demands.* Now, though laws may not elsewhere be so ill devised or vilely construed as to bid directly for fraud in building, yet these effects are not confined to England. On the Continent, to the extent of our observation, there is the same general, almost invariable tendency toward flimsy construction, the same expenditure of labor in making deceptive show. In Stuttgart, for example, a house a hundred years old will still be good for another hundred, when one that is to-day in building will have ceased to be even a ruin. We build thin houses in America, but it would be hard to find in American cities such

* Our informant, whose name is known and honored on both sides the Atlantic, was a brother of the legal gentleman referred to, and had the story from his mouth.

examples of painted botchery in domestic architecture as are to be seen in the capital of Würtemberg.

Under such a system, honesty is not fostered, but starved; fraud is not systematically weeded out, but cultivated; civilization puts at odds the morals that are its life-blood, and puts a premium upon the vices that would destroy it. Deceptive production, in the first place, makes labor a school of demoralization. The workman knows well what is done; he helps the employer cheat; it is a poisoned air, that no one can live in long, and remain healthy. The system comes to this: Be honest at your peril. In an examination some years since, before an English Parliamentary commission, a dealer, reported as highly respectable, was asked if he thought it morally right to put up and vend as pure coffee an article containing but a small percentage of the berry. "Perfectly right!" responded he, without a moment's hesitation, and not without some virtuous displeasure that such a matter should at all be brought into question. "But how," it was inquired, "will it be with the dealer next door, who sells only pure coffee as such?" "Cannot he make a mixed article too?" retorted the respectable: "if he has not sagacity enough for that, let him fail, he deserves it!" And the good man closed with a vigorous reclamation in behalf of free competition. In the moral assimilation of bad conditions one man is quicker than another, and profits by his celerity; but in the long run and on the large scale conscience grows to the climate it lives in, and the dealer next door, if not in due time morally reconciled with his climate, will at least die of it, and leave the place to suppler constitutions.

It is not here intimated that such examples represent the usual conscience of production and trade, but they do represent its climate, with the effect of this upon susceptible constitutions. Now, it is but too plain that *something* is operating in modern society to displace the scruples of honesty and honor. Gross betrayals of pecuniary trust, — how frequent they are grown! Hardly a week fails to bring intelligence of some glaring example; one is surprised rather to miss than to find them in the columns of the newspaper. Look, too, at the list of defaulters, and see what names are there! — names of men never made to be rogues, and indeed that never meant to be

such, but fell into the ways of the world, took liberties, and could not take them back. Look at the list of corporations which gravely vote to "pass" the interest on their bonds! We have trusted private interest too far, have permitted too much, have left men to be schooled by their practical conditions into laxities that, become general, unstring civilization; and society, that feels itself a sufferer, obscurely feels also its complicity in the cause of its suffering, and scruples to lay blame upon the individual.

How much the permitted license of competition has to do with the effects just noted, we are unable to say. The system itself, meanwhile, is not only advantageous, but inevitable; to rage against it is vain, to attempt its displacement Quixotic. But that, as now conditioned, it generates a bad air and makes typhus, is out of question. Meanwhile, we make no excuse for dwelling rather upon the moral aspects of the case than upon oppression in the shape of pecuniary injury, for that is simply to go to the root of the matter, even though it is here presented for political consideration. Civilization has its system of morals which are not only necessary to it, but are itself, its vital essence. Civilization, — what is it at bottom but an imperative preference of peace to violence, of honesty to fraud, of industry to idleness, of just to lawless possession, in short, of a cultured and productive human life to one beastly and barren? It is human virtue that makes such a preference; and only when such virtue rules, is lawgiver, master, magistrate, can civilization prosper, or in the end exist. Government is properly the means to organize and effectuate that rule, and failing notably, habitually there, it is a Belshazzar that perhaps does *not* see the writing on the wall, but against which no less the sentence is gone out, "Tried in the balance and found wanting"; nor will anything in its form, however good as matter of form, atone for that defect of function. Government cannot indeed make virtue, nor need do so, for human nature brings forth the needed supply, not superabundant, but enough to live on, if the harvest be properly husbanded; but government can and must be an economist of morals.

5. To pass to another topic. The system of free labor, that

is, of free individual engagement, is in many aspects a precious acquisition. It makes the laborer his own man, heightens in him the individual consciousness, and leaves open to him the way to all that outward success which is commonly desired among men. Moreover, there is in the system a principle of self-regulation, of which it has already been said, the more of it the better, provided the regulation be really effected. Under the best conduct, the modern method would doubtless be attended by occasional hardships, but by none surely equal to the general hardship implied in an iron system designed to render any particular case of suffering impossible. Nevertheless, if to satisfy those immediately concerned be success, free labor, as known at present, borders upon failure. Labor itself has risen in arms against it, and an organization is spread through all the countries of Christendom, whose purpose is to make the war general and systematic. The recent remarkable progress of socialist democracy in Germany, evinced by the election of ten or eleven members to the *Reichstag*, — while giving by these numbers but a faint hint of its force at the polls, — is only one symptom of a social disorder already, in greater or less degree, coextensive with Occidental civilization. Indeed, in the immense social agitation initiated in our day, and destined, it seems clear, to characterize the coming century, no element betrays or promises a profounder disturbance than just this of free labor. A little while ago it gave the age a word to conjure with; and now, while the echoes of its praise are yet in the ears, there breaks forth from its own side a fierce jarring note of complaint, incrimination, menace. “Down with the middle classes!” roars the International in Europe. “He that works for wages is a slave!” cries labor-reform in America. “I cannot help rejoicing,” said to us an ex-mechanic in Massachusetts, — whose face, by the way, indicated intelligence, while his language and manners were those of culture and good breeding, — “I cannot help rejoicing at every bankruptcy, and think thefts, robberies, burglaries, useful; they help to distribute property!” Surely labor is sore ill, and these are its groans. For these wild utterances are not merely expressions of feeling peculiar to here and there an unbalanced nature; they represent the

fixed, insuperable persuasion of not a few, and beyond this a good deal of that half-grown persuasion, which is above all the element wherein revolutions foment.

Aside from strikes, the grudge of labor is a constant deduction from its effect. Wendell Phillips, quick to detect symptoms of social disorder, but also far *too* quick to pronounce upon them, denounces the "wage-system" as teaching the laborer to "skulk and cheat," rather than to do his best. An impatient mind would take a short cut to truth, and quits the road only to butt the wall. But it has indeed become too commonly true that laborers skulk and cheat, especially the discontented ones, who profess labor reform. "A fair day's work for a fair day's wage," is scarcely now the customary chant of toil, as in the old time when England was merry. On the contrary, some at least avow it as their maxim, "The least possible work for the highest possible pay." In the workingmen's unions of Berlin, it was recommended that a bricklayer who had been accustomed to lay eight hundred bricks a day should for the future lay only two hundred, that four times as many hands might be needed, and the demand get ahead of the supply.

Meantime, labor *is* oppressed, no doubt of it, and in two ways. The theory of the laborer's situation is this: in return for a moderate, but assured, support, he consents to forego the chances of fortune, leaving to the capitalist, along with these, those risks of loss which he himself cannot afford to incur. The theory is too often falsified in fact. The lawless cupidity of speculation makes inflation, to be followed by collapse, and periodically turns workmen out of employ by the ten thousand. The risks, therefore, not merely of capital in its ordinary productive use, but of speculative gaming, are forced upon the laboring class, while the winnings of the gamester are never theirs. Again, the purchasing power of wages is steadily reduced: first, by cheap money, which tells the laborer he gets three dollars a day, when in truth he has but two and a half; secondly, by speculative inflation of prices; thirdly, by so multiplying the risks upon trade and production that each man engaged in them must perforce try to cover his hazard with a large margin of profit; fourthly, by labor itself

that "skulks and cheats," and so clips the dollar in its own hand.

In fine, here is a disturbed social condition, whose costs in money or money's worth are immense, while yet inconsiderable beside the injury done in other ways, as by the making of bad blood, of infatuations, and of a violent spirit, prepared to say, all is fair in war. Of course, it can be said that evils cure themselves, and that this one will do so. Yes, evils *do* cure themselves; their supply is exhausted, and they die of their own havoc. Evils famish themselves by killing what had nourished them. The *human* style of cure is another, we should say. But our business here is simply to note the condition,—a very oppressive one, clearly not made by government, nor as yet manageable by it. Nor, perhaps, will it ever become manageable otherwise than by sustaining a better general regimen.

6. The last of those great economical changes, implying profound social change, which are here touched upon, stands in closest connection to the last mentioned. It consists in the extensive substitution of machinery driven by steam or the like for simple hand-labor. Is it necessary to spend words in exhibiting the accession of productive power which has come therewith? Everybody knows it; fable is outdone by fact. Limitless energies of nature are become our journeymen, lightning our mail-carrier. This new power, however, is not ploughing seas and prairies alone, but human society as well; far and wide already it has upturned the old sward, to leave the brown soil bare, unless a new genius of social tilth shall follow. Without this, one plainly sees, the earth will teem, but man himself become barren. There are broad areas even now that lie too nearly bare; in many a Manchester, those human fields, which one covers with the term "operative," look desolate, the health and hope and cheer of labor, that clothed them once, too obviously turned under.

The class of operatives, made pendent to a business which they do not own, able to attain in it the distinction of a master only by fighting their way out of their own class into another (not humanly possible in one case out of a thousand), fixed in a condition of class-separation, and with almost no play of

sympathetic human relation between them and those with whom they are economically connected, — these persons, scarcely known as persons, but purchased merely as “labor,” are thrown together in manufacturing towns by the hundred, thousand, ten thousand; they see, for the most part, only one another, speak, listen only to one another, and generate together a style of sentiment and opinion that springs only from their peculiar position. But as there are many of them, in an intercourse numerically large, though in character so limited, this sentiment is confirmed between mouth and ear; thus they acquire for what is, in truth, the product of a singularly narrow experience, narrower than individual experience is commonly, a sense of universal validity, as if it were what everybody sees and says. It is observed that “striking” fraternities are usually unwilling to hear a syllable from the other party. The reason is, their ears are full already; among themselves they have beforehand obtained that social confirmation of individual opinion which commonly suffices to give assurance. A certain amount of general saying is certitude for most men; with that, the particular seems sustained by the universal; and this point reached, all else which might be said is set down in advance as naught or worse. Thus, while the situation is really a hard one, and while its hardship is but too likely to be mistaken for one wilfully imposed by the employer, the discontent that may be generated talks only with itself, and, nevertheless, obtains all that confirmation which comes from a wide social interlocution and a consent of opinion equal in extent. The remarkable and ever-growing development of socialistic doctrine among the operative classes in Europe is due to this singular condition, and is now recognized by all thoughtful Europeans as a very grave matter. In America such doctrine is still an exotic, — as the Canada thistle was once. The thistle is sufficiently at home here now.

But while the isolation of the operative leads to sentiment intensely partial on the one side, there is partiality also on the other. In Europe we have met with a Manchester capitalist, a man of reading, courteous in manners, genial in conversation, and, to judge from his personal impression apart from his opinions, of kindly nature. He made it a point of principle

to *give* nothing, directly or indirectly, to subsidize no charity, to relieve no distress. "If," said he, "a man is poor, he is so by his own fault or that of his progenitors; his poverty is the just reward of his indolence, intemperance, ignorance, incapacity, one or all, or of the like in his parents. What have I to do with the matter? It is simply immoral to meddle. Nature feeds industry, starves idleness, feeds intelligence and knowledge, starves ignorance and stupidity; that is her system of morals, and no man has any right to interfere with it. Talk of misfortune; your meddling benevolence is the misfortune, with its trying to keep *in* what Nature tries to starve out. Let alone, let every man have what he can lawfully get, along with what he lawfully inherits; then each will have just what he deserves, that is, all that does or can honestly belong to him. I come of a family characterized by prudence, diligence, sobriety, and good judgment in the conduct of business; I inherit the fruit of that, as it is right I should do, and have added to it. Another comes of a family that has been habitually lazy or improvident or intemperate, and whose wits have suffered from its habits; he inherits the fruit of that, as it is right he should do. If he can fight his way out of that bad inheritance, good; he will deserve to be quit of it when by his own exertion he actually is so. It is his affair, he is his own man. People talk about the 'virtues' of charity, generosity, etc.; they are vices, not virtues. *Cost, pay, profit*, are the wholesome words; stick to those, as Nature does. If I give a man a shilling, or lend him one as matter of favor, I make a thief of him, and become myself a party to the theft. The shilling is not his, it is mine, and yet he has it; he has simply picked my pocket with my own complicity." The words here are our own, but the doctrine is fairly represented. There is sense in it, too; and yet between socialism on the one hand, and *Manchesterism* (if this be it) on the other, who will judge to the discredit of the former alone? Machinery, in making a class of capitalists and a class of operatives, has brought out on both sides a class-sentiment, just when the demands of the situation could be met only by a new breadth and integrity of feeling and thinking. On both sides there is the partiality of private interest, with the mutual misunderstanding which must come of it.

Did this case stand alone, were our civilization otherwise well settled, the cleft would close up, a good understanding between the divided parties be reached by mutual approximation; for men are not mere blind embodiments of private interest, but also in part, if often in too small part, rational creatures. At present, however, the cleft clearly widens from year to year, and, complicated with so much else to the like effect, threatens to go on widening. Capital and labor both suffer in consequence, the community at large suffers with them, and it is easy to see, or rather impossible not to see, that, with a continuance and continued exasperation of these conditions, the affliction will become intolerable.

This completes the enumeration proposed. What we have seen is an accession of productive powers, vast in proportion, munificent in promise, rich in effect already attained. But these powers, representing private interest, share its limitations, and do not place themselves in healthy relation with the public weal. Meantime, the public system, whose function it is to sustain the conditions of social health, resembles, in presence of these new forces, a coachman who has learned well how to guide a team of horses, but suddenly finds himself in charge of a locomotive-engine, and knows not which way to turn. In this posture of affairs numberless oppressions arise, sometimes in collision, sometimes in collusion, with one another, and either way taxing the community, breaking up its amity, and corrupting its *morale*. And this it is which is here signalized as especially the modern type of oppression.

Private interest empowered, escaped control, and running at last into sheer corrupting disease, that everywhere infects the modern spirit, — that is, summarily, the situation. What should be done? It is easy to answer the question in general, though to answer it in detail would require the study of some decades, even if that study were resolutely set about, and steadily pursued, with application of the best abilities to it. In general, however, the way is clearly indicated, though it be like a way through the wilderness, plain enough by compass, but to be made with many a stroke of labor. In the sphere of the public system the work is to be done. What is the state here for, in the first instance, but to uphold the necessary order, and

with it the necessary morals, of civilization against the assaults of private passion and the partialities of private interest? To this end, consciously and expressly, the federal system was framed: resume the spirit that gave it birth; qualify it to do the work for which it was brought into being. Nor, to this purpose, will there be any call for an endless drizzle of interferences: a little, done in season, and really *done*, will suffice. No need to be always trying, if one will drive here and there a bolt of iron and rightly clinched. Give us sound iron in the right place, and we shall have no occasion to be always pottering with rope-yarns. But sound iron, — do the people see that in the public system now? They *say* the contrary, and loudly, copiously enough. The attitude, indeed, of us Americans toward our government is singular, and may be counted by a future age among those curiosities of history which would be incredible, were they not history. In the form of it we have an enthusiastic faith: in the fact of it, next to none; profuse praise of the one, prodigal distrust, incrimination, contempt of the other, run side by side, like the clear waters of the Mississippi and the turbid current of the Missouri immediately after their junction. It may be, however, that the contradiction indicates good sense rather than the want of it, and that the nation hits the nail upon the head in both instances. The form of the government was made by the Federalists, but Jefferson boasted that he and his confederates had evicted the practical principles which at first went into it, and substituted others radically different.

However this be, certain it is that, along with rapturous praise of the Republic as a form, there goes measureless reproach of its practical character and action. No parliamentary body within the limits of civilization is less trusted and respected by the nation at large than the American Congress by the American people. From no national legislature is less expected; the best hope of the people is to be spared, not served; to escape without injury, and be no worse off at the close of a session than at its opening, is thought a piece of luck, and it is not often that anything like a consenting voice of the people declares them to have been even in that degree lucky. So in the several States; very commonly, the meeting of legislative

bodies is looked to with apprehension, while a sigh of relief is breathed when they adjourn. In no other civilized land is official character rated lower; in none is the political class more distinctly out of credit. *Politician*, as everybody knows, is a word quite ruined in reputation by long keeping of bad company, or of what passes for such. Our method of making officials is perfection, but the thing made is promptly pronounced bad work by the mechanic himself. A man is respectable until he is elected; no sooner have the people put their stamp upon him than they incline to call him branded; the impression of their own merit recommends him to their own suspicion as base metal. Stephen Douglas reproached the clergy with quitting clean ground to draggle their skirts in "the dirty pool of politics." Well hit! cried the multitude; no one thought democracy vilified in being characterized as foul water; to be a dirty pool was serenely assumed as its normal condition. It is a curious posture. "If America is right, Jefferson was right," says Parton. Does America itself say that it is right? — not as to its form of government, which Jefferson did not help to make, and which would never have been made had his wishes prevailed, but as to the practical character of its politics. It has a singular way of saying so, if that be the thing said!

In 1863, or thereabouts, a great American orator addressed the labor-reformers assembled in Faneuil Hall, and in one of his most effective paragraphs gave his opinion of the coin which our political mint brings forth. His address is not now before us, nor immediately accessible; we do not therefore profess to quote from it, but will venture to state from memory the general purport of the paragraph in question. Somewhat to the following effect the passage lies in our recollection: "Legislation has no conscience: don't waste time in holding a candle to a blind eye. The legislator looks to one thing, his private interest, especially his interest to get himself re-elected: there he has feeling, there you will touch him, and make him feel. The fiction is that he takes his place to think, study, learn, labor, for the public weal; the fact is that he takes it to speculate on his private account, speculate in popular favor, and make out of it what he can. Treat him accordingly; no inquiring

about his convictions as a statesman, he has none ; he is your tool, or you are his ; inquire, choose whether you will be his tool, or make him yours. Choose : and understand that his selfish devotion to his own interest, which would betray you, is also the handle by which to lay hold of and use him. He will sell you, if you permit him, or sell himself to you, if you compel him. Be his purchaser and not his wares ; bribe his interest on the one hand, threaten it on the other ; make your terms, and say, Here, give us your vote, we will give you ours. If he begin playing the considerate statesman, talking of what is just and for the weal of the community, he is trying to jockey you. Put an end to that ; tell him he is not in the pulpit, but in the market, that you have made your bid, that if he will knock himself down to you, the bargain is made, and that if he do not, you will bear your bid elsewhere. Do this," said the orator, "and in a year the politicians will be about you begging you to take them at your own terms." We repeat that here is no pretence of reproducing the words, or even the tone, but we are as confident as a firm recollection at some years' distance can make one,—recollection from carefully reading, not simply hearing,—that the substance of the advice given is here not unfairly represented. The speech was approved, printed, circulated,—circulates yet, most likely ; and in respect to this remarkable passage, has not, to our knowledge, incurred public criticism. Perhaps such counsel made rather for the speaker's credit as a man, wrong-headed indeed about measures, but very knowing in his judgment of motives and men.

Were it, now, the question whether official character in our Republic was there justly described, we should at once answer, No ; it is a description of the disease with which our politics are plagued, but which, nevertheless, is their plague, not their type ; and meantime we hold that the advocate, in counselling his clients to accept that measureless demoralization of democracy which he imagined, to adjust themselves to it, speculate in it, make a profit from it, did them and his country as vicious a piece of service as any man could render with honest intents. The point, however, is that such things could be said, approved by the auditors, and not condemned by the public. Distrust has gone so far ! Mr. Parton goes to Washington,

dines with Congressmen, is convinced they do not generally steal, says so publicly, and is laughed at for his credulity ; a journal suggests that good dinners, like charity, cover a multitude of sins.

In fine, modern civilization is rich beyond example, and rich in liberalities, magnanimities, humane interests and intents, no less than in material resource, but it is disordered, and it is worm-eaten ; and in America the condition is extreme on both sides. No nation is so preyed upon, and none has so much which can be preyed upon. Private interest has been put in command of agents more able, means more opulent, than imagination had dreamed of ; it has come to devise and will in a royal way. One thing is wanting, a ruling order adequate to the new conditions. Let the time but govern well what it has got, and it may cease to boast ; its deeds will be its praise. Here, however, the defect is flagrant ; the business of governing our conditions is ill done and in a bad way. And because this is the case, disorders increase, oppressions multiply ; the nation is plundered in pocket, imperilled in morals ; angry discontent is the mood of millions, distrust of all ; agitation, insecurity, unhealthy excitement, hope to win and fear to lose, alike hovering in uncertainty, alike heightened by imagination, unsettle conserving customs, break up the traditions of honesty and honor, reduce intellect to skipping, snatching processes, and prey even upon physical health ; trade, harassed by the speculating larvæ, learns their methods, if only in self-defence ; platform-professors of reform instruct applauding audiences to see in our institutions only the egotism of individuals, in the labors of public life only the plotting of private interest ; and philanthropy itself, seduced in imagination by the too prevalent condition, meditates the making of universal felicity at a stroke by some grand "operation" with a lie at the bottom. Social war is already announced ; labor is in the field against capital, "granges" against corporations ; and what is believed to be justice is sought by the methods of extortion. This is the shadowed side of modern life, the offset to its magnificent and incomparable achievements. Rich and deranged, liberal and lax, productive and a prey, spacious in sentiment and bewildered in moral judgment, principled in a philanthropy

world-large and scarce able to believe in simple honesty, hoping all things, like charity, and, unlike charity, driving a bargain, it may be, with Satan to obtain hope's fruition, civilization resembles a spring day, when sunshine and sleet come together, and the blossoms, prodigal in beauty and promise on every hillside, open their hearts to the one only to receive with it the other.

Numbers cannot see this, because they are habituated to it, as formerly men at the South could not see barbarism in the *régime* of the revolver, the bludgeon, and the bowie-knife. Numbers, again, simply will not see it, since they must be happy, and to be happy must think there is no danger. The latter class, much the less penetrable of the two, bolt the doctrine of progress to their sides, and go about iron-clad against instruction. Progress, say they; enough, nothing is amiss; be a philosopher, and be sure that all is well. They look down with pity upon those who do not see in thickening evils only "evolution," but trouble themselves rather to evolve an understanding and a duty. These, on their side, have somewhat to say, and it runs to the following effect: "There is indeed progress, notable, wonderful progress, and therefore work to be done. Progress must continually learn new arts of precaution and purgation, not to be buried at length under its own accumulated slough. Rome died of progress, as other nations had done before, and as yet others will, perhaps, do again. Were men more able to profit by either the lessons of history or those of external nature, the rushing advance of our civilization, considering the specific character of that advance, would scarce be an occasion for wordy exultation or sanguine unconcern; for when private progress is toward power and the means of exaction, while the public progress is rather toward diffuse liberality without able conduct, then, if ever, is that progress in a way to become its own plague."

D. A. WASSON.